

*Sovereign Grace Displayed:*

O R,

DISCRIMINATING MERCY

Made Known and Exemplified

IN THE CASE OF

C A I N and A B E L.

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A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT

LEWES in SUSSEX,

JUNE 4, 1788.

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BY JOHN LLOYD,  
TENTERDEN, KENT.

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# SOVEREIGN GRACE

## DISPLAYED, &c.

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GEN. iv. 4, 5.

— *And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering. But unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect.*

WE have here presented to our view, a very striking relation of the conduct of the two first men that were ever born into this world; one a believer, and the other an unbeliever. We see in the offerings these men brought before the Lord, and the different receptions they met with, something of the workings of their hearts in a religious view of things, and the failings of mankind, with regard to their sentiments of what they judge to be the ground of their acceptance with God; some judging it to be by the works of the law; others, by the Person, Blood, and Righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we may also see, how God approves of the one, and what sovereign contempt he casts upon the other.

One of the first things we meet with in Scripture, after the Fall, is an account of instituted worship. It was "in process of time," that these persons mentioned in our text brought their offerings, no doubt, to Adam, as the head and priest of the family, who was to present these offerings for them unto the Lord. Doubtless the father received the offering of his first-born son, with at least as much affection and devotion as he did that of his younger. Cain's offering in itself was by no means contemptible: what could he have brought better than "the fruit of the ground," as expressive of his holding all the good things of this life, which he was favoured to enjoy, merely at the pleasure of his most gracious Creator and bountiful Benefactor? an offering worthy a state of innocence itself! And, indeed, here was the deficiency of it, that he refused to acknowledge himself a sinner, as we shall see hereafter; especially when we come to contrast these two offerings together—the Lord has respect to the one, but not to the other.

In discoursing on these words, we shall,

*First*, Shew, that the Lord makes a difference in his acceptance, both of the persons and offerings of those who are, and those who are not, his people.

*Secondly*, Point out the grounds of this distinction and difference here made.

*Thirdly*, Shew the effects this distinction has upon the spirit and conduct of the different persons who are the subjects of it.

*Fourthly*, Make some doctrinal remarks upon the whole.

*First*,

*First*, Shew that the Lord makes a difference in his acceptance, both of the persons and offerings of those who are, and those who are not, his people.

I. Of the persons. The Lord had respect to the person of Abel. How had God respect to the person of Abel, more than to the person of Cain? for it is not his offering we are now speaking of: his offering had never been accepted, if his person had not first been so. It is a matter of no small consequence, how God views our persons. If he considers us in ourselves, and not as standing in the person of his own dear Son, we shall not meet with acceptance either here or hereafter. Here the mercy of our God is discriminating; nor is there any other reason for this discrimination, than his own sovereign pleasure. God's grace is his own, and he will confer it on whom, when, where, and how he pleases; nor will he ask our leave about it: he will do his own pleasure, not ours. His will is the rule of his actions, and he is a competent judge of the rectitude of his own conduct. It is enough for us, if he say, *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

And you will further observe, if any of the children of God are brought into any particular distress and trouble, so as to need his gracious interposition on their behalf, on what ground he condescends to help them. Is it on account of their misery only? Rather, is it not his *covenant mercy* that induces him to regard them? How came God to regard his people of old, under their grievous Egyptian bondage? If you read Exodus ii. 24, 25,



you will see, God remembered his *covenant*, and then he had respect unto them. They might have groaned long enough, as other slaves before, and since, have done, and died under their sufferings (and God has been righteous in permitting these things so to be); but these slaves may not so die, while God remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And though many continue under worse than Egyptian bondage, and perish in the same, yet God's people may not: while God remembers his everlasting covenant with his own Son, he will be sure to have respect to them, and bring them out of these miserable circumstances. God respects his people, as the only people in the world who are his proper portion. True, he owns all the world besides; and he divides to the nations their inheritance, he separates the sons of Adam, he sets the bounds of the people. What people? The world at large, as well as the seven accursed nations, who were to be cast out, to make room for his ancient people the Jews. All mankind are under his government; he fixes their bounds for them. But, how? As having an eye to his own people. It is according to the number of the children of Israel, who are considered as the Lord's portion. See Deut. xxxii. 8, 9. Here God respects them in all he does, even his people, in creating the world, in preserving it, in wisely ordering and adjusting every thing respecting the affairs of it; as, the spot of ground each individual of his people shall live upon, the parents of whom they shall be born, their situations in life, the manner and circumstances of their death, the instruments of their troubles, the honoured instruments of their deliverances, in which the whole world of mankind are  
either



either directly or remotely concerned: so that God regards mankind only as they have some concern or other with his people; and makes them subservient to his purposes, for the real, substantial advantage of his elect, even when they mean the very reverse, as much as when they are kindly disposed towards them. God had respect to Abel, when he permitted Cain to kill him, who killed himself more than he killed Abel. Thus God respects his people in his everlasting covenant of grace, and makes all persons, and things, subservient to their eternal welfare and happiness.

II. God respects the offerings of his people. What is there in the offerings of the people of God, that makes them so acceptable to him? And why are not the offerings of others equally accepted? Why does God so much respect the one, and not the other? Because the one has something to bring, which the other has not. We shall endeavour, therefore, to shew what are those peculiarities, which make this grand distinction in the offerings of those who are the children of God, and those who are not. And,

1. Abel's offering was in faith. *By faith, Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain,* Heb. xi. 4. He believed, and heartily entered into the truth, so far as it was then revealed. He knew on what ground he must be accepted, should he be accepted at all. He knew he deserved to be rejected, as being, by nature, under the most tremendous curse of a broken covenant—that nothing he could do in these circumstances, but would deserve God's wrath and just displeasure—that whatsoever is not of faith, is sin—that faith is the gift of God—that no efforts of his could produce it—that it must be the efficacious grace of God that must enable him cordially to receive the divine testimony, and heartily to believe it.

Impressed

Impressed with a sense of the importance of these truths, he came with a reverential awe, yet believing hope, that God would accept of his person and offering, through the then promised seed of the woman, which was to bruise the serpent's head; and thus his offering was accepted.

But now let us contrast the offering of Cain with that of Abel. It appears from the reply which God made to the resentments of Cain, because his offering was not accepted, how he thought he must be accepted, if accepted at all. How, but by his "doing well," or by the works of the law. God tells him this, ver. 7, and very properly, If he does well, he shall certainly be accepted; i. e. if he keep the law in thought, word, and deed, he shall live by it. If he offend in one point, he is guilty of the whole, and comes under all the curses of it. These are the terms of the covenant of works; and the righteous God will take care to make all self-justiciaries keep to it. Here they want to fly off, and as often quarrel with God's law, as they do with his gospel. And the event often shews how well they do, in order to their acceptance; for, not having true and saving faith, they are of course destitute of every thing that is substantially good; and, like Cain, are ready for any wickedness, when they seem the most pious, especially if their pharisaical humour be contradicted. Such a creature is man, if he makes a profession of religion, and does not enter heartily into the spirit of the gospel; as appears from the case before us.

2. Abel's offering had a peculiar excellency in it, which Cain's had not; called *more excellent*, Heb. xi. 4. Abel's was more than a sacrifice of acknowledgment, it was typical of the great propitiatory sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. In short, it was a bloody

bloody offering, for *without shedding of blood there is no remission*, Heb. ix. 22. Abel came before God as a criminal, as a capital convict: he laid his guilty hand, as we may suppose, on the head of the sacrifice; he there confessed his sins, and implored divine favour through the great propitiatory sacrifice, of which this was only a type. Here he saw the doctrine of Christ being made sin for his people; for, having confessed his sins, in manner and form before observed, he now considers the Victim on whom his sins are typically transferred, a meet sacrifice to the justice of God. Now the Victim is slain; his blood is poured out before the Lord, in which he beholds the atonement made, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. For it appears that Abel brought, not only the firstlings of his flock, but also the fat thereof, ver. 4; which shews they were slain, according to the rule afterwards laid down in Lev. iii. 16. Now let us contrast Cain's offering with this. And here we may discover the spirit by which he is influenced in his offering. He has other views than the necessity of a bloody offering to make an atonement for his guilty soul; his thoughts run rather upon his bodily and temporal concerns: the great God who knows all hearts sees this, and answers him according to the feelings of his heart. It is the right of primogeniture that sticks in his stomach; he had evidently seen that God had rejected his offering, perhaps by blowing the smoke of the sacrifice into his face (as some think), and he sensibly felt for the consequences of it. Who knows where such a thing as this may end? It is more than probable this favourite may be advanced to the temporal privileges of the first-born, and that Cain with all his progeny may become slaves and vassals to Abel and to his family. That he had  
such



such thoughts as these, appears by God's obviating this difficulty that arose in his mind; and therefore the Lord tells him, verse 7, *That Abel's desire shall be to Cain, and that Cain shall rule over him.* This may a little conciliate his mind. 'Thou shalt sustain no worldly loss, Cain, from my discriminating mercy to thy brother: thou shalt be his superior in worldly matters, tho' destitute of saving grace—*thou shalt rule over him.*' Wicked men have generally the ascendancy in all matters relating to this world; God has provided a better world for his people. Our religion does not intrude upon the natural rights and privileges of mankind: the world have nothing of this sort to fear from the real godly; and if they have their fears, they are certainly groundless, as here in the case of Cain. How despicable the feelings of natural men, who, instead of being charmed with the doctrine of atonement through the precious blood of Christ, conceive of religion to be no otherwise good or bad, but as it comports with their worldly honours and emoluments! Self righteousness lies as the foundation of the one, free grace as the foundation of the other. He that has no better righteousness than his own, had need make the best he can of this world, for he is not likely to have much in the other.

3. *Abel's offering bore witness for him that he was righteous*, Heb. xi. 4. hence he is called *righteous Abel*, Matt. xxiii. 35. Wherein does it appear that this offering of his shewed him to be righteous?—What! Is there any thing unrighteous in simply bringing the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord, that this distinction should be made here between the two brothers, that the one should be considered righteous, the other wicked? From whence then does this remarkable distinction arise? Not from any righteousness

righteousness in Abel, for *there is none righteous, no, not one*, Rom. iii. 10. Then Abel was not righteous in himself, more than Cain; and yet his offering bears witness and testimony for him, that he is righteous. Now where is this righteousness? If it be not in himself, it is in another, or it is not at all: hear what the Apostle says, Phil. iii. 9. *And be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.* Abel had this witness or testimony for him, That he had this righteousness which is of God, this imputed righteousness of Christ; and being thus made righteous in Christ's righteousness, his actions corresponded with the same; for God himself testified of his gifts, that they proved him to be righteous. But now the reverse of all this appears to be in Cain; his works are said to be evil, 1 John iii. 12. and that *he slew his brother because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.* But where was the evil of his works before he slew his brother? The sacred history gives us no particular account of any gross immoral behaviour in Cain prior to his killing his brother, yet his works are said to be evil; yea, they were evil when he brought his offering, notwithstanding his seeming piety in bringing of it; for *he was of that wicked one*, says the forementioned text, and consequently no good could come from him; he was wicked at heart, as all are who have not Christ's righteousness upon them; he was one of those despisers who wonder and perish; his evil works lay in his infidelity and unbelief, and his proud and scornful conduct resulting therefrom, as may appear to a discerning mind, from his behaviour after he had murdered his brother. He thought he was as good as he  
had

had need to be; nor did he want any testimony of his being righteous in any other righteousness than his own; nor did he want God himself to testify to his gifts, any otherwise than he thought them deserving; nor could he perceive any reason why what he had offered to God, should not be considered as such; nor could he see any need of those peculiarities we have been insisting upon, nor any great sin in slighting of them; and his brethren are of the same opinion to this day. God's righteousness is of very little consequence to them, while they think they have a righteousness of their own; and this lies at the bottom of all the unrighteousness, impiety, and wickedness, that ever was, or ever will be, committed in the world. This is the quarrel, about which Cain killed his brother, because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. We now proceed to our

*Second general head*, which is, To point out the grounds of this distinction and difference here made.

And, I. Negatively. It is not in ourselves. Because,

1. *We were by nature children of wrath, even as others, Eph. ii. 3. i. e.* We deserved wrath as much as those who perish in their sins, though we are not *vessels of wrath fitted to destruction*; for God has not thus appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet we are equally deserving wrath with those who are in hell. It is not for us to boast of a difference made in our favour, as if we were something very extraordinary in ourselves. What hast thou, believer, that thou hast not received? Thou oughtest not then to glory as tho' thou hadst not received it. Hadst thou thy proper deserts, thou hadst been in hell long ago. Here is no room for one who was by nature a child of wrath,



to glory in himself: though his person and offering be accepted, boasting is for ever excluded here.

2. We are not only by nature children of wrath, but we are altogether so helpless, that it is utterly impossible for us, by any thing we can do, to extricate ourselves out of these miserable circumstances. Every effort of ours to emancipate ourselves out of this worse than Egyptian slavery (suppose we had an inclination by nature so to do) would be abortive: we are not sufficient of ourselves so much as to think any thing as of ourselves. Thou canst not command a good thought, if it would purchase Heaven; no, not the regenerate themselves, without the gracious assistance of the Spirit of God. How then can unregenerate sinners help themselves, who are in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity, dead in trespasses and sins? And if they come under natural convictions of conscience, they will be very pious in their way, reject Christ's righteousness, and go about to establish a righteousness of their own; and will persevere in so doing, to their everlasting destruction, if the grace of God does not interpose, and pluck them as brands out of the burning: they will never come out of this situation, if God does not pluck them out, Zech. iii. 2. So that they are totally helpless, as to any thing they can do towards delivering themselves. Nor is this all; for they are not only helpless, but they are,

3. Altogether worthless. We always conceive it right to help the worthy, and to discountenance the worthless. If God had observed this method, we had been ruined for ever! Pray what worthiness or excellency will you find in our fallen nature, that may recommend us to the favourable acceptance of our offended Lord and Judge? Examine into the

B.

conduct

conduct of our first parents : Do you perceive any thing worthy in their conduct ? Do they ingenuously confess their faults ? Do they ask pardon ? Are they sorry they have offended so gracious a Majesty ? Do they discover that they sincerely love him, though they have been so unhappy as to offend him ? Are they more concerned for his glory, than for the just punishment of their own iniquity ? Nothing of all this. As soon as sin entered into their souls, they lost every generous, God-like sentiment, and all their posterity by nature enter heartily into their spirit ; as appears from the whole of their conduct, before they know the Lord, and some part of their conduct afterwards. If you would wish to be further satisfied, that man by nature is such a very worthless being as here described, then take notice of the methods of Divine Grace in our regeneration. See what concern corrupt nature has with it, whether it be any ways conducive to it. If our corrupt nature be only helpless, it will gladly embrace assistance ; but if it be worthless, it will oppose any assistance brought to it ; as appears when we are told, *That we are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*, John i. 13. None of these are conducive to our new birth, but the reverse, as we shall shew.

1. *As to blood.* Here God is no respecter of persons, Acts x. 34, 35. If any had a right to discriminating mercy from blood and kindred, it must be God's ancient people the Jews, the seed of Abraham God's friend, who had the mark and sign of circumcision in their flesh ; and so distinguished from all the world besides. Yet they were not all Israel, who were called Israel : many who were circumcised in flesh, were uncircumcised in heart and ears. Yet these

these were known to be God's professing people throughout the whole Jewish theocracy: but notwithstanding this peculiar privilege of theirs, if you examine their national character, you will find the account Moses gives of them by divine inspiration to be true: *Their spot is not the spot of his children*, Deut. xxxii. 5. Nor is it being born of religious parents, that renders us worthy of such discriminating mercy; for Scripture and fact demonstrate to the contrary, that it is not of blood,

Nor, 2. *the will of the flesh*, or free will, i. e. any thing we can do by the strength of nature. We do not make ourselves willing to receive this discriminating mercy of God, they having a fixed and utter aversion to God's way of salvation; so far from having any inclination towards it, that our wills are determined against it, and would remain so, if we were not made willing in the day of God's power; according to Psalm cx. 3.

Nor, 3. is it according to *the will of man*; not by all the acquirements of human nature, not by any thing man can attain by all his wisdom and skill in matters of religion; God respecteth not any that are wise of heart; See Job xxxvii. 24. Yea, the things of the Gospel are often intentionally hid from them, Luke x. 21. So far is God from paying any particular deference to persons of such a description, and Christ himself rejoices in spirit that it is so: So that neither the will nor wit of man can do any thing in this case. We now proceed,

II. and positively. What is the true ground of this distinction here made by God himself, in regard to his acceptance of the persons and offerings of the parties mentioned in our text?



Which I take to be this, viz. God's original constitution of things in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, to which he makes every thing subservient in the dispensations of his providence and grace, for the manifestation of his own glory, as well as the salvation of his church and people. This I take to be the true ground of all the distinction that God is pleased to make amongst the sons and daughters of Adam. Perhaps some of you may think, that your eternal salvation was God's prime end in his everlasting councils and purposes of grace towards you. Let me tell you, if you think so, you are greatly mistaken.

I have read over the Scriptures several times, and I confess, that I cannot perceive any other prime end and design that God has in the whole œconomy of our redemption and salvation, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, but the advancing of his own glory; our salvation is only a secondary end. His prime end is the praise and glory of his grace, see Eph. i. 6. This lays a foundation for such distinctions to be made, as shall best conduce to this grand and noble purpose; and every creature in heaven, earth, and hell, shall be subservient thereunto. We shall endeavour to shew you, wherein this appears, first, in the dispensations of his providence; secondly, in the dispensations of his grace.

1. In the dispensations of his providence. *God in his providence made all things for himself.* Prov. xvi. 4. So, in the original constitution of things, every thing was made for Christ. This world, and all things else, were not only made by him, which proves his proper deity, and equality with the Father; but they were made *for him*, Colos. i. 16. So that mankind would never have had a world to have lived in, if it had  
had

had not been for this constitution of things, in the person of Christ. Let not any who live and die in their sins, imagine that God gives them the good things of this life, merely to oblige them, and so value themselves upon what they possess, because raised a little higher than their fellow-worms; for death will soon bring them upon a level with the meanest of their fellow-creatures; and not only so, but it will open to them such scenes in another state, in which they will see they have served such purposes as they never could have thought of, or conceived: they will see, that God made his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sent his rain on the just and on the unjust, for different purposes to what they ever conceived. This world stands only for the elect: It is ours, 1 Cor. iii. 22. if we are the children of God. According to the constitution of things before laid down, every thing in creation, and providence, concurs to bring about the glory of God, and our everlasting salvation. Were it not for this constitution of things in the person of Christ, we should have no good security, that all things should work together for our good; for many things seem to work against the godly, and would, were it not for this, prove fatal to them. In this view of things, creatures are no more to us than what God makes them; nor will any thing contribute so much to calm the minds of the godly, and enable them to live upon a covenant God by the day, as a firm and steady belief of these important truths. If these things be true, there is no happiness in this world, but with the election of grace: nor indeed with them, but as they have recourse to this manifold wisdom of God. Every thing short hereof is superficial.

2. This divine constitution of things appears, not only in the dispensations of God's providence, but also in the dispensations of his grace, which are sovereign and free. What concern had you in your salvation? nay, even your creation? He brought you into being without your advice or consent, nor was you capable of giving it, if required. What concern had you in the book of life? Your name was entered without your knowledge, or privity. What concern had you in providing a surety, a days-man, a Saviour? What concern had you in being born in a land of light and liberty? And when the Gospel was brought in the sound of it to your ears, what hand had you in making it effectual to the conversion of your souls? Who slew the enmity and prejudice of your minds against divine truth? Who gave you to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Who wrought a divine principle of grace and holiness in your hearts? Who taught you to love him in his appointments? How came you to delight in the Scriptures? Who did all these things for you? Did you do them yourselves, or did any do them for you? You trust you believe in Christ for life and salvation. But how came you so to do? It was given to you to believe.—The fear of God is put into your hearts. But who put it there? You are kept from departing from God, but whose power is it keeps you? Not yours, but the power of God; his almighty power. And why all this grace for you? Millions eternally perish without it. Why not for others, even those who perish, as well as you? God does not want you. He is infinitely happy in himself, and needs none of his creatures to add to his essential glory and blessedness. He wants neither your person nor your offerings; you  
can



can add nothing to him, nor take any thing from him. Who must provide, that you turn not this grace of our Lord Jesus Christ into wantonness? It is more than you can answer for: his grace must be sufficient for you, or you have no security. You see, brethren, where your great strength lies. Now, if you would wish to know further about this glorious display of the riches of sovereign grace, as seen in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, see Exod. xxxiv. 5—7. where we have an account of the Name of the Lord, as proclaimed by himself, which runs thus: *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.* And yet it is added, that he *will by no means clear the guilty.* From which you may evidently see, that though there be so much mercy in the heart of God, and though it be so plentifully made known in the text alluded to; yet it does not clash with his justice—for he will by no means clear the guilty: which shews the necessity of our guilt being transformed to Christ, or we are guilty; so guilty as that God will never clear us; and if he does not discharge us, we must lie under guilt and wrath to all eternity; for if God does not clear us, none else can do it. So that you may see, that tho' God is exceeding merciful, yet he is exceeding just at the same time, and that all his attributes harmonize together, in the plan of our redemption and salvation, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ; mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. Now the whole of this is calculated to exalt the sovereign grace of God, and to debase the creature into the very dust. Hence, how often do we find the sovereign Judge of the world proclaiming, I, even

even I, and there is none besides me—(we are for bringing in our I, but God will have no other I but himself)—I, even I. This is the sole ground of all the distinction made by God, between his creatures, in the dispensations of his providence and grace; the glorifying of his own great name; though I know this is very disgustful to the feelings of proud Man; which brings me to our

*Third general head*, which is, to shew the effects this distinction has upon the spirit and conduct of the different persons who are the subjects of it. And,

I. The effect it has upon the godly, which is to glorify God; which they sometimes do in the words of Divine Inspiration, as follows: *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given unto him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever, Amen.* Rom. xi. 33—36. The godly admire and adore, though they cannot sufficiently comprehend this mystery; yea, they often acknowledge they know but very little, and see but in part, and are often ashamed of their short-comings; yet they heartily enter into the spirit of these truths, according to the measure of knowledge bestowed upon them. And though corrupt nature in them may sometimes rise against these things (for they are abhorrent to every feeling of our rebellious nature), yet the truly godly man knows, and approves of them, at the very time his corrupt passions and affections rise against them; for which he as often  
repents,

repents, and abhors himself in dust and ashes, to think he should set up his foolish reasonings against *the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God*; for there is a very material difference between a man's hating any truth of God, and not being able to comprehend the same to his full satisfaction. But we proceed to shew the effects this has on the spirit and conduct of,

## II. The Ungodly. And,

1. It discovers itself in their pride and resentment against God himself. For, having a very good opinion of themselves, and seeing no cause why either their persons or offerings should be rejected, they inwardly boil with rage and resentment against God himself—as in the case before us; for we read in verse 5. *That Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.* He had a hellish gloom in his visage, a down-cast look full of rage and disappointment, and very different from that dejection which is found in the minds of the godly under their first convictions, or any time afterwards. It arises from a very different cause. The one is dejected under a feeling sense of the evil nature of sin; the other apprehends himself slighted, neglected, and even injured—and that without cause. The one acknowledges God's sovereign right to bestow his favours as he pleases; the other thinks he has done his duty as it ought to be done; consequently needs no such discriminating favour. The one, in short, thinks he deserves God's wrath; the other thinks he deserves eternal life. And how is it possible, for one who thinks he deserves so well, to be otherwise than very wroth to meet with such a sad disappointment, and which was so contrary to his expectations?



tions? So it will be at last with all self-justiciaries, who, instead of meeting with the approbation of Heaven for their pious and well-spent life, as they call it (though it will be found, that there has been but very little piety, if any, in the whole of it), that they will be rejected for want of a righteousness to cover their guilty, filthy, and polluted souls from the eyes of strict and impartial justice. How horrid the disappointment! which will be attended with weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Such have often been admonished of these things here below, by Christ's faithful ministers; but they were too proud, and too good in their own eyes, to pay any regard to it; but now they are convinced of their mistake, to their everlasting shame and confusion. Another sad effect this discriminating mercy of God has on the spirit and conduct of the ungodly, is,

2. To lead them to persecute the children of God; as appears from the case before us. We are told, verse 8. that Cain talked with Abel, his brother; and it should seem that, while they were in the field together, Cain rose up against his brother, and slew him. Now it appears, they were talking upon the subject; which conversation raised the resentment of Cain, not only against God, but against his brother also. The subject of God's discriminating mercy, is a provoking subject to corrupt nature at any time; but especially after such a display of it as in the case before us. Now what might we suppose their conversation turned upon, think you? Some imagine Cain "maintained that there was no judgment to come, no future state, no rewards and punishments in the other world; and that when Abel spoke in defence of these truths,

Cain

Cain took that occasion to fall upon him." But this does not seem likely; for Cain (though a wicked man) does not discover such a spirit as this before he murdered his brother, whatever he might do afterwards; for then he would have brought no offering at all to be either accepted or rejected. But Cain was not one of this sort: he was very religious in his way, therefore he brought his offering; and the discourse between his brother and him, probably turned upon the subject of the offering, and the reason why his might not be accepted as well as Abel's. Probably Cain might say to his brother, What is the reason why my offering might not be accepted as well as yours? And very probably Abel might reply, " Brother, you may remember the account given by our honoured parents of their ejection from Eden's garden, for their first transgression: we their sinful offspring are justly obnoxious to the justice of God, being made and constituted sinners by our father's first offence, even by his act of disobedience, Rom. v. 19. Yet Grace interposed in our favour through the promised seed, and sinners may now approach the majesty of Heaven, through his great propitiatory sacrifice. Here, brother, I saw the need of a sacrifice of atonement, before I could presume to bring any sacrifice of acknowledgment to offended justice. It was by faith in this precious atonement, brother, that my offering met with acceptance; and I wish, were it the pleasure of Heaven, you might enjoy the same happiness with myself." Doubtless, Cain would object to all this. And this would give occasion for Abel to speak of the riches of Sovereign Grace, and that it was not owing to any goodness in him, that he was enabled to receive the atonement

ment more than Cain; which discourse naturally involves in it such things, as to render it in the eyes of Cain grievous and intolerable; so that, I wonder not that he rose up against his brother, and slew him; I should have wondered more if he had not done it. It is matter of no small wonder and astonishment, that the Church of God has been preserved through so many ages from the rage of persecutors to the present moment of time; especially as discriminating mercy runs through the whole of the doctrine, experience, and practice of the godly; and which is what all self righteous and wicked men abhor from their very hearts and souls. When the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent are reconciled together, there will be an end of persecution; which will never be in this world. Another effect this discriminating mercy of God has on the spirit and conduct of the ungodly, is,

3. Rebellion against God; as appears from the case before us. We read, verse 9. that the Lord called upon Cain, to know what was become of Abel, his brother. He does not at first charge him with the murder of his brother, he only inquires where he is; and this was very proper. God had told him, he should rule over his brother. Surely, then, he had a right to protect him. God calls upon him, to know if he had taken that care of his brother as he ought to have done. Where is he? Probably he was missing the next Sabbath, when the family came to bring their offerings, or pay their devotions. Where is Abel? Cain is a proper person to be inquired of, and to give a proper account of him. But mark his stubborn and rebellious answer: I know not, am I my brother's keeper? Didst thou ever charge



me with him? or have I any right to take care of him? Thou madest him a favourite, why hadst thou not taken more care of him? What intolerable insolence! And this is the temper of every self-righteous man; who, when he thinks that God does not pay that respect to his person, and services, as he thinks they deserve, begins to be insolent, and opens his mouth in rebellion against God; charges him with folly, in pretending to make favourites, and then taking no better care of them. Heaven's favourites are like sheep appointed to the slaughter; and the world affect to know nor care nothing about them. Nor do they conceive themselves to lie under any obligations to the Almighty, to do any more than they find themselves in their present fallen state capable of performing—as if their apostacy from God was no fault or crime of theirs. And hence they think they have a right to be insolent; and instead of acknowledging their inability to every thing that is morally good, as an heinous offence or crime, they consider it as an excuse for their rebellion. Cain brought the best offering he knew of; yet it was his wickedness, that he knew of no better: it shewed a vile principle in him, which was at the bottom of his rebellious conduct, in insulting the majesty of Heaven, by presuming to come to God in any other character than that of a sinner; and had he not been consummately wicked, he durst not have done it. Men make that which is their offence, their defence. If God is not the wisest and best of Beings, it is no harm to be by nature disaffected to him, nor are we under any obligation to obey him; nor is there any sin in disowning the obligation; nor is there any need of a sacrifice of atonement, in case of transgression: So that we are at liberty to worship

God in any way that seems most eligible to us, without being so particular about this matter. But if the Divine Being be possessed of every thing that is truly and essentially good, then sin is an infinite evil, and we are under an obligation to eternal punishment in consequence of the same: nor can this obligation be removed but by the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ; nor durst we approach to God any otherwise than through the same, but at the peril of our souls. Yet no man, by nature, sincerely believes this; hence he is a rebel against the Sovereign Majesty of Heaven; and had rather arraign the conduct of the Most High, than condemn himself. He is in a state of rebellion, while he goes about to establish his own righteousness, and will not submit to the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Another sad effect this discriminating mercy of God has upon the spirit and conduct of the ungodly, is,

*Fourthly, To drive them to despair.*

Here I would be understood to mean, that these are the necessary and natural effects, as they operate on our corrupt nature, unless the grace of God interpose in our favour, which grace is sovereign and free. Otherwise, it will, as said before, drive to despair; as appears from the case before us. Hence we read, verse 13. That Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear; or, as in the margin of your Bibles, Mine iniquity is greater, than that it may be forgiven. What a sudden transition is here! The man who before refused to acknowledge himself a sinner, now thinks  
his

his iniquity too great to be forgiven. Why so? Blood-guiltiness is a horrid crime; especially the blood of an own brother, so good a brother, and in such a quarrel in which God's honour was so deeply concerned. Yet, here we cannot help observing this same self-righteous temper discovering itself in Cain as much as ever: one would be almost ready to hope, that this vile miscreant, after so foul an act of fratricide, would willingly come into the views of the Gospel. How suitable the Gospel to the vilest and worst of characters, if they have grace to receive it! Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. But Cain will not allow this: if he may not be saved by his own righteousness, he will despair, and die eternally; for appeal to the Atonement he will not.

It is much easier to drive self-righteous persons to despair, than to allure them to Christ. The common operations of the Spirit, upon the natural consciences of men, will do the one; but the exceeding greatness of his power, even that power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, Eph. i. 19, 20. is necessary for the other. We now proceed to our

*Fourth and last general head, which is, To make some doctrinal remarks and observations upon the whole.*

And, I. We may here see the necessity of a satisfaction to the justice of God for sin. Is it not something very surprising, that men in general have an idea of satisfaction as it respects themselves; who, if they receive the smallest injury from their fellow-worms, imagine themselves affronted? and how



badly hurt are they in their feelings, for the least neglect or slight put upon them by their fellow-creatures! and how ready are they to resent it upon all occasions! And in doing this, they only think they maintain the dignity of their characters, and observe a proper decorum, to secure themselves from any contempt in future from their fellow-mortals: and how far has this been carried by some, who think an affront of this sort can never be repaired, but with the loss of precious life! Nor do they only speculate upon this point, but they demonstrate that they are really in earnest, when they meet by mutual consent to take away each others lives, for sometimes the most trivial matters, merely upon a point of honour. Not to say any thing at present upon such a practice as this, does it not shew the sad depravity of our corrupt nature, that we can be so quick in apprehending any affront or injury offered to our own persons, and yet be so callous in our feelings, in regard to that most intolerable affront offered to the majesty of Heaven by our sins and transgressions? What, is God the only contemptible Being, who is unworthy our regard, and who is obliged to put up with all our folly and insolence, as often as we chuse to offer it him? Is he so much beneath our notice, that we need neither to regard his good will or ill will? What, may we sin with impunity, because we think he does not stand upon a point of honour with us? What if we offend him, and after say we are sorry, though no satisfaction be made to his justice; do you think your confession is a satisfaction? By no means, let me tell you: if you are not tender of God's honour, he will be tender of his own; he will do himself justice, as he has both ability and power for it. God's pardoning of  
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our sins, is as much an act of his justice as his mercy; it is an act of justice to the satisfaction of Christ: hence he is said to be faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, 1 John i. 9. Had Cain believed this, his indignation would have been against himself: he would have revered the character of Jehovah, and consequently would never have killed his brother. So, if natural and self-righteous men were made acquainted with the grace of God, they would soon see the importance of Christ's making complete satisfaction for sin, from their experience of the manifold imperfections and deficiencies in the divine life, in which they would perceive that they must come short of eternal life, without such a satisfaction; or else the justice, righteousness, and holiness of God's nature and perfections must be greatly sullied. To suppose either, is dreadful.

Remark II. We may also see the necessity of true saving faith in the Person, Blood, and Righteousness of Christ, to render our services acceptable to God; for we are told, Heb. xi. 6. That without faith it is impossible to please God. This shews the necessity of the Gospel; for how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? Rom. x. 14. Yet Cain's infidelity did not arise from the want of a Divine Revelation; he was not left to the feeble light of Nature, in regard to external Revelation: No, he had the same advantages as Abel; and had he been gracious, he would have had the advantage of him, as the first-born and head of the family, in matters of religion, upon the death of his father Adam: but he was excluded from all this as an unbeliever, as well as a murderer; in some sense, he excluded himself; for we read, verse 16. that he went out from the presence of the Lord. You see, he could have no  
communion

communion in the Church, which was then in Adam's family, because he was an unbeliever; and this was seen in his general conduct, as appears from what has been said. Now how could he please God, who had no principle of goodness in him, consequently could never produce any thing that was good? There being no good in him, no good could come from him: therefore, above all things, it behoves us to be right in this one thing, even in our being possessed of true sovereign faith. Besides, it is by this grace of faith, that we hold all our communion with God; for though love be said to be the greatest of the cardinal graces, yet faith is the most useful in this life; nor can you ever enjoy the love of God here below, but as helped by faith. The truths of the Gospel are not received by the godly, merely as matters of opinion, but as matters of faith. By believing, they rest their eternal all upon the things believed; they embark their souls and bodies, all they have and are, upon the strength of it. If their faith fails, all fails with them; but Christ's prayer for them prevents this. If Abel's faith had been superficial, he had never borne such a testimony for God as he is said to do; and if what he had was only opinion, it would not have been worth his while to have thrown away his life about it. This is the reason we have so many empty professors; because all lies in speculation, nothing in faith. God will bring his people to live by faith, not by sense; to take God at his word; and this brings glory to God, and tends, in the hour of trial, to discover who are, and who are not, the children of God, more than any thing besides. Cain and Abel were both professors of religion, when they brought their offerings;



ings; only one was a believer, and the other was not.

Remark III. We may also from these things see the happiness of acquiescing in God's divine sovereignty, in which the Most High does not chuse to give us an account of his matters; he frequently crosses our expectations, and where we hope the most, we find the least—as in the case before us; as we read in verse 1. That Eve pronounced her first-born son, “a man from the Lord;” or, as in the margin, “the man the Lord;” which, according to some, she supposed to be the Messiah, or the promised seed. She calls his name Cain, or Possession; and having possession, as she thinks, of so great a blessing, she calls his brother by the name of Abel, verse 2. or Vanity; thinking every thing else to be vanity, in comparison of what she had now obtained. But how wretchedly mistaken was she in the event! We often think the Lord's anointed is before us, because we look too much to the appearance of things; but God's thoughts are not ours in the choice of his people. And sometimes it is a hard matter for us to admit his choice, when it is pointed out to us; because it is not according to our minds, nor are we content he should dispose of us any otherwise than as it is agreeable to our inclination. Hence we quarrel more with his divine sovereignty, than with any other subject whatever; and one very great end and design of afflictions, is to bow our stubborn minds to this doctrine. A most noble instance of this sort we have in the case of David, when he fled from Absalom his son. We are told in 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. *That the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city. If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it and his*

*his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold here am I; let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.* You see he is not for prescribing to the Almighty, what he shall do with him. And had it been possible for Cain to have been of his spirit, all would have been well with him: could he have referred himself to God, and desired to have known what would have been acceptable, the remedy would have been pointed out to him. Perhaps some may say, Ought we then to be willing to be damned, if it should be the pleasure of the Lord? Some have asserted this, but not proved it. God's people ought not to be willing to be damned, in the proper sense of the word; for damnation includes in it, not only penal punishment for sin, but all that anger, rage, and fury, against the Divine Being, which is peculiar to the reprobate in those circumstances. How can a godly man be willing to submit to hate God with the most perfect hatred, as a damned soul undoubtedly doth? But if you are willing to refer yourselves to God, for him to do what he pleases with you, you shall never be damned. But Cain's pride will by no means admit of this; nor did Sovereign Grace see fit to bestow that divine wisdom and gracious experience upon him, which would have cured his folly; and we are sure he could not attain it by any effort of corrupt nature: so that he was left under the power of his own ignorance and prejudice, to his everlasting perdition. How unsearchable God's judgments, and his ways past finding out! It is the temper of all self-righteous men, to litigate the point with God; they never will submit to God's constitution of things in the person of Christ, in the manner before observed, on any consideration whatsoever; the natural consequence

quence of which will be, Sin will lie at their door, as unatoned for, the effects of which are too dreadful even to mention ; in which the Sovereign Judge of all the earth will display his awful, but righteous severity, on those who despise his grace, on the one hand; and his entire approbation of the persons, and offerings, of those who unfeignedly love and fear him, on the other. Now, brethren, to which of these do you belong? How are your hearts affected towards these things? If the fear of God be in your hearts, you will desire to be saved in that way which will bring glory to God's name, as well as salvation to your souls. God grant that this may be your happy case!

F I N I S.



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